

Good Afternoon, Chairman Kurtz and the members of the Families, Children and Seniors Standing Committee. My name is Ruth Kenaga, a specialized treatment foster parent caring for teenage girls from residential placements and adopted mother of one now 9 year old and have two biological children, ages 30 and 21. I am the President of the Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents (MAFAK), Michigan Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Coalition Leader, Affiliate member of the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) and member of the North American Council for Adoptable Children (NACAC). I appreciate the opportunity to address the Committee representing Foster, Adoptive and Kinship parents across the state and the impact of HB4649 would have on our parents.

As a state run DHS it can be confusing for our parents when every county licensing office is run differently and I have to say that I have been licensed for 15 years by a private agency, Child and Family Services of N.E. Michigan and have not suffered from these problems that other parents have, I have been treated with the upmost respect, dignity and consideration, I have always felt heard and supported by my agency as a member of the team, so when I get emails and phone calls from our parents in other counties that they are being harassed and discriminated against and not being considered as part of the team, they are told not to attend court hearings or team meetings and not being treated as an equal team member and most foster parents do not participate in the Individual Service Plan. Under page 2 section 12(A), page 4 and 5 section 22(R)(i-iv).

Under section 10(O), On behalf of our parents that have suffered consequences for the request to have a child moved upon reasonable notice from the foster home have been told that there is no other placements for the child and have caused to be stressful for both the parent and child especially when the child and other members of the foster home cannot be kept safe when the agency cannot remove the child after the time for removal has expired or immediately when the child has caused harm or assaulted the caregiver or a member of the caregivers family. Then the foster parent it retaliated against and does not receive another placement of a child for a length of time.

Page 3 HB4649 Section (H) The right to a Fair, Timely, And Impartial Investigation of Complaints Concerning the Foster Parent's Licensure, the right to have a person of the foster parent's choosing present during an investigation, and due process during the investigation. (I) The right to request and receive mediation or an administrative review of decisions affecting licensing parameters, or to have both mediation and administrative review. (J) The right to have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically tied to the licensing standard violated. ***It is appalling and outrageous to know that a foster parent's livelihood and future can be stripped away from them within moments of an accusation or incident without due process, our parent's have been put on central registry and lost their jobs as teachers, nurses,***

***and other jobs that require a license to work the job that they have worked so hard to obtain later to have paid out thousands of dollars in attorney fees to eventually have it expunged.***

***In a statement made by Colin Parks from DHS in a meeting on September 24, that there are over 40 % of foster parents that get expunged from the central registry each year, THAT IS WAY TOO MANY, from the time of being put on the central registry to the time of it being expunged the damage has already been done and many times at the hands of a worker that lacks experience in the child welfare field, our parents are guilty until proven innocent and how ironic it is that the biological parents can abuse and neglect these children that come into care and they are not held accountable or to be prosecuted but to be put through a rehabilitation plan and reunify with their children and what are the statistics in these children re- entering the foster care system for continued abuse and neglect at the hands of their biological parents. Colin Parks said that it is a myth that foster parents are being held at a higher standard, MYTH OR FACT?, You read the statistics and decide, some of our parents have been foster/adoptive parents for more than 25 years without one allegation until it does happen, all foster parents are not immune to this and almost all of us have had an allegation at one time. I have emails from many foster parents and worried when reading a statement from one parent who also was a worker, lost her job and license, she didn't fight the system to have her expunged from the central registry, she just gave up and a quote from her email read "Life just isn't worth living anymore", how can I live with myself not to share this information and hope that this didn't result in this parent doing something tragic to herself.***

I am worried about our parents and many of them that do not realize what can happen because they are not given that information during orientation and how to work with the system our parents need to have some real life training lead by other parents to also have the support when something does happen. We lose many foster parents every year because they didn't realize in their training how difficult it can be to parent these special needs children and understanding the many traumas that the children have endured at the hands of their biological families, we need to protect our parents by giving them the information up front with the right kind of training to provide stability to these very vulnerable children.

Thank you all for the opportunity to speak before you today, I could say so much more but you have heard from others and please help us to get this bill passed that has been 8 years in the making along with the HB4650 without the support of HB4650 this bill of rights is just a piece of paper. Sixteen other states (attached) have a similar bill and we looked at them all, that information is available on the NFPA website ([nfpaonline.org](http://nfpaonline.org)), copies were given to all.

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